

# American Romanticism 1800-1860

American Romanticism can best be described as a journey away from the corruption of civilization and the limits of rational thought and toward the integrity of nature and the freedom of the imagination.

- I. Romanticism
  - a. Feelings & intuition over reason
  - b. Came from Enlightenment & French Revolution
  - c. Influence on literature, music, and painting
  - d. In Europe & England from second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century into the 19<sup>th</sup> – Came to America later
  - e. Reaction against rationalism
    - i. Imagination could reach truths beyond what the rational mind could
  - f. Poetry – big part
  - g. Faith in inner experience and imagination
  - h. Seeks unspoiled nature
  - i. Youthful innocence over educated sophistication
  - j. Finds beauty & truth in exotic locales, supernatural realm, and inner world of the imagination
  - k. Finds inspiration in myth, legend, and folk culture
- II. Romantic Approaches
  - a. Gothic novel (past, exotic, supernatural)
    - i. Wild & haunted landscapes
    - ii. Supernatural events
    - iii. Mysterious medieval castles
    - iv. Psychological exploration of the mind
    - v. Edgar Allen Poe, Coleridge, Emily & Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen
    - vi. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*
  - b. Lyric poems (natural world)
    - i. Sees a commonplace object/event and recorded it in a poem
    - ii. Contemplation of natural world led to a general emotional and intellectual awakening
- III. American Style
  - a. Westward expansion – unavailable to Europeans

- i. Nationalist spirit & rapid spread of cities
  - b. James Fenimore Cooper
    - i. Natty Bumppo – First American heroic figure
      - 1. Youthful, innocent, intuitive, close to nature, & uneasy w/women
      - 2. Quests for some higher truth in the natural world
- IV. American Romantic Poetry
  - a. Still based on European literary traditions but American settings & subject matter
    - i. American folk themes
    - ii. Descriptions of the American landscape
    - iii. Abolitionist issues
    - iv. American Indian culture
    - v. Celebrations of American people, places, and events
  - b. Fireside Poets
    - i. Boston group of men
      - 1. Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, Lowell
    - ii. Poems often read by families by the fire